

9-1973

September 1973

O.P. Kretzmann
Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/campus_commentary

Recommended Citation

Kretzmann, O.P., "September 1973" (1973). *Campus Commentary*. 50.
https://scholar.valpo.edu/campus_commentary/50

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives & Special Collections at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus Commentary by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.



campus commentary



September, 1973

Dear Brother:

It was a hot stifling day in New Orleans during the synodical convention in July. Most of the delegates there had sought refuge from the heat in an air-conditioned room appropriately called "Rivergate." In an atmosphere of tightness and meanness the assembled delegates attempted to marshal their forces for what was to be the climax of the convention: the public trial of a seminary president (the first in the history of the Synod) for malfeasance — the new crime in the story of synodical decay and acts contrary to the expressed wishes and will of the synodical president. The delegates gathered, some with frothing mouths, for this show of strength.

~~I decidedly had another reason. A few minutes earlier I had heard in the convention hall the familiar rumble of another New Orleans storm. It had an ominous ring. It sounded for all the world like the beginning of a crackup of an organization to which I had belonged for forty years, which had sustained me, and under whose benevolent eye I had acquired some theological training in years gone by. This organization was now accused of subverting and changing some imperatives which I know lay close to its heart and soul.~~

This fiftieth convention of the Missouri Synod had been heralded as a convention of rejoicing; rejoicing over one hundred and twenty-five years of manifest divine power, more than a century of pure doctrine and faithful people — but it had not turned out that way. It was a furor of recriminations, a cesspool of surprises, a focusing of resurrected hatreds. A celebration, so planned, turned into a shambles of ingratitude to Him who had given us eternity, and who had now caught us in the act of unfaithfulness. We had forgotten the life-giving stability that alone can create a heavenly life even here in this maelstrom of conflicting opinions and viewpoints that could give peace and hope.

We were a forgetting convention. The one great purpose of a convention, especially at the end of a time like ours in history, is to give a group of people a rest for peace of mind. We have seen these false crutches for the coming year crumble — distrusts from which there seems to be no hope of recovery — losses which I cannot forget — disappointments too great to begin over — failures too complete even to be made over. We came to a convention as brothers who have gone through the same dark night of the soul, who have learned that there are things in life that are unmendable — that can not be made whole again.

But there is hope on the horizon of God. It is in this sense that a convention can inspire, to give us a new spirit and a new vision of the overriding power and glory of God, of His indomitable hope for the future. This is why we looked for a truly repentant convention. It must be a true rejoicing in God, with God, in hope, in charity, with the profound understanding of the undercurrents of life which lead to resolutions that are beyond human understanding and the demands of official regrets. To use these potentially valuable hours for the human expression of regrets is not enough. The taking back of former statements, and all the endless machinery of reconsideration and the all too obvious emphasis on our humanness leads only to corporate and parliamentary regret.

"The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." With the singing of this hymn by almost four hundred voices, some by their singing stood aside from the convention's low point of purely organizational fellowship to point to the high and holy unity of the Church of which the hymnist sings. Despite all signs of human decay and splitting by schisms rent asunder and decline of fellowship there is always the watchful eye of a seeing God who will not permit the children to be lost in the world's noise and pain. They could not speak because their speech had not been understood. So they sang of their unshakable unity in Christ, and their song carried the hope that they would walk with God, the Three in One, the mystic sweet communion of those whose rest was won. They tied together the souls of those who slept in forgotten cemeteries and fields — all the ten thousand times ten thousand whose final conquest was prophesied by ancient prophets and Isaiah and the Child. They saw the ultimate outcome of this dark moment in the history of the Church.

Four hundred delegates were protesting making the Bible the foundation, and its inspiration the security of

our faith and of the Gospel. "The Letter kills, the Spirit gives life." St. Paul's words could be paraphrased, "The formal principle kills, the material gives life."

But our church is schizophrenic. Its Gospel and Scripture are two separate principles, not integral at all. It is as though, in our way of using the doctrine of inspiration, the hymn came through something as follows:

Our church has two foundations,
First Scripture, then the Lord.
Its holy inspiration
Diffuses Christ, the Word.
From heaven God gave the Bible,
The *letter* was our pride.
We hugged it without rival
Until our *spirit* died.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FROM RIVERGATE TO THE CHURCH

The Sound of a Scream – However else the sound from Rivergate is interpreted, it needs to be heard as a scream. The pain had become unbearable. Oppressed brethren answered in the only way they could. "Get off me, you are crushing me!" The scream sought relief – and with it a pardonable sense of momentary vengeance. "Let somebody else do the screaming for a change!"

Together with the great "credibility barrier," the "scream" is a phenomenon to be reckoned with. It can be explored by conversation with brethren who participated in it and felt the relief. The voice is there, ready to interpret. It says things like these:

"I am only a simple pastor, trying to do my work. The Seminary does not care about me. It talks down to me, makes me feel like a fool. The CTM is too hard to read, not worth the effort. Even if I had time to read it, it gives me nothing I can use where I am. It disturbs me, but fails to comfort me."

Again, "When the Seminary says 'un-Lutheran' to President Preus, it says 'un-Lutheran' to me. I identify with him, belong to the Missouri he describes. To attack him is to attack me. I stand accused, but cannot comprehend the accusation."

The Scream continues, "The Seminary has had it all its own way. Professors have felt free to pursue their exotic learning, to delight in new knowledge. But they are totally out of touch with me. They have no feeling for the church as I know it. It is supposed to be the church's Seminary. How can it be that, when I can no longer joyfully, confidently, proudly identify with it!"

And again, "The Seminary has not been honest with me. It calls me 'un-Lutheran,' yet insists nothing has really changed. Well, I know that *I* have not changed! I am preaching and teaching faithfully the way the Pastor did who confirmed me, the way I was taught. If the Seminary cannot even realize that it has changed, it is either blind or dishonest."

"What else can I conclude!" the Scream says. "The abstract intellectualism at the Seminary is rationalism. The Seminary is evasive, not playing square with the church. Its responses all look defensive and tactical to me, as though designed to cover up a secret subversion of the Scripture principle by a specious use of the Gospel. What about the simple question of historicity, for example! Why cannot the Seminary understand that question, and give the church a direct, simple, and clear answer!"

The voice says, "You talk of suffering, of persons and families who will suffer. Have you no feeling for that minority on the Seminary faculty, for their pain, for what they have suffered? They have felt judged, excluded, accused, unwanted, unheard. I identify with them. Their pain is my pain. If they could not be loved and heard in the fellowship of the whole faculty, how can I expect to be loved and heard from where I am?"

Therefore the Scream. It is more than theological. It is from brethren of ours, deeply wounded.

If that Scream can be heard now, and even welcomed for what it is telling us, that in itself could be seen as a gift of divine and necessary grace – and a little sign of hope for our beloved church's tomorrow.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FROM HEAVEN TO THE CHURCH

The Voice of Scripture – Have you noticed the propers on these Sundays immediately following the Convention – how familiar pericopes burst with new depths of meaning for us? That too is a sign of divine grace

— the living Lord at work through our painful history with His promise of life and healing.

An Old Testament lesson for the fifth Sunday after Trinity, Lamentations 3:22-33, offers us the vision we so much need, as though to say, “Yes, you must look closely at the event and try to understand it. But while you are looking there, do not fail to lift your eyes above all to Me and to My wisdom and promises. For that is your hope!”

Listen to this Word as God speaks it to you by His holy prophet:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness.
‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul,
‘therefore I will hope in him.’

The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him;
let him put his mouth in the dust — there may yet be hope;
let him give his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.

For the LORD will not cast off forever,
but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly (arbitrarily?) afflict
or grieve the sons of men.”

Beyond all human cause, beyond all we have done to hurt one another, it is He who has laid this yoke upon us, grieved and afflicted us. But that Lord of ours is also “our portion,” the one treasure above all others. As our hearts cling to Him, we can afford to hold loosely everything else we have treasured — above all, any illusion concerning the perfection of our own individual rightness — until He has revealed the “good” He promises us.

That “good” begins, says our Lord, with this, that we should “quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

His salvation points to an outcome beyond anything that we can engineer with all our striving and determined wisdom.

“Quietly” can only mean, without further tumult of our own displays of power in battle against one another. Our call is to search His Word, share its comfort with one another, and meanwhile rest in Him.

In such quietness of waiting for His healing, we can look at one another through the eye by which our Lord sees us — a bride without blemish for His blood’s sake, held not by our will but by His grace as one body, with one Lord, one faith, one baptism. **His steadfast love transcends our human doubts and suspicions of one another, even the pains we have suffered from one another.**

By that love we can dare to wait quietly, in unity of hope, for the dawn of His new morning.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I remember a few words which I wrote five years ago at the turning of another year:

“His prayer.....‘Father, forgive.’ Forgive me — for the lost but unforgotten hours of the dying year, for the erring way and barren heart.....The pivot of the year is too brief to say more than the one word which makes the years an altar stair and the time of life the lifting of the angelic trumpets.....Midnight is lonely now with lonely bells, and my candle of prayer burns low.....There is only one cross on the altar tonight.....On the hill there were three, but the children of the man on the cross to the left are blowing whistles tonight, and the children of the man on the right are in sanctuaries the world over.....His time was short, perhaps shorter than mine, but his prayer was good,

much better than mine.....Remember me.....Make my failures Thy victories and the years of my sins the eternity of Thy grace.....Remember me.....Thy footsteps grow brighter as the year grows dim, and no calendar can limit Thy power.....Remember me.....This moment, not of yesterday nor of tomorrow, is Thine just as the years are Thine.....

“There are other voices in the sanctuary now, the waiting saints made perfect at last and the great multitude past human numbering who have been remembered at altars in heaven and on earth.....In a little while we shall be as wise as they whose wisdom is a song: ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’”

As ever,

O. P. Kretzmann